

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

OUR AMAZING BIRDS. By Robert S. Lemmon. American Garden Guild and Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1952: 7 × 10 in., 239 pp., 102 black and white text-figs. and pls. \$3.95.

This attractive work can hardly fail to teach the lay reader a great deal about birds, and to impress him with some of "the little-known facts about their private lives." Based on the not-unreasonable premise that facts about almost *any* bird are "little-known" and "amazing," it presents much basic and interesting life-history information, in easily readable form and embellished with numerous fine illustrations. The latter were done by Don Eckelberry, who according to the foreword had also a considerable part in the selection and preparation of text material.

While each of the 102 one- to two-page accounts treats a single North American species, or occasionally a small group, there has been a commendable effort to include comments of broader taxonomic and geographic application. The selected representatives of about 51 families include some rare and spectacular (and even extinct) birds, as well as some of the most commonplace. There is no semblance of systematic arrangement, and scientific names have properly been almost entirely omitted. The breezy, colloquial style is highly anthropomorphic, and laden with superlatives and glowing comparisons. It is sometimes refreshing, sometimes tiresome, and occasionally not altogether lucid ("The brown creeper belongs to a very small bird family . . . But it is not at all embarrassed by loneliness."). Some errors of fact are apparent. The male Tree Swallow, for example, ordinarily does *not* incubate; and "all true woodpeckers" do *not* "live primarily" on food gathered by "banging away with chisel-pointed bills until they have hammered a hole." The illustration showing a male hummingbird hovering solicitously beside the nest, while not impossible, at once strikes a false note.

Eckelberry's wash drawings are unquestionably the main attraction for the ornithologist. As is frequently the case, the best of the smaller text figures have more freshness and life than some of the more ambitious plates; but with few exceptions they range from good to superb. Throughout the series the artist's originality and excellent draftsmanship are apparent. We are looking up from below at the kingfisher, and down from above at the robin, and the Blue Jay is facing almost directly away; there are few conventional profiles. In almost every case the portrayal of forms and attitudes is impressively convincing. The backgrounds, employing a wide variety of treatments, are excellent, except for occasional lapses, as in the case of the branch which to my eye persists in making the Winter Wren appear several times as large as it should.

I noticed only one typographical error. The format of the book is neat and modern throughout, the paper and print very good, and the brief index adequate for its purpose.—WILLIAM A. LUNK.

THE YELLOW WAGTAIL. By Stuart Smith. Collins, St. James Place, London, 1950: 5½ × 7¾ in., xiv + 178 pp., 26 paintings, 11 black and white photographs, 4 line drawings, 4 maps. 12s. 6d.

This is one of the excellent "New Naturalist Monographs." Based on seven years' study it discusses *Motacilla flava* in general and particular as may be judged from the table of contents: the bird and its breeding distribution; winter quarters and migrations; territory, pair-formation and aggressive display; nuptial display; the nest; the clutch; the brood; the final phase; the story of a name; the Yellow Wagtail group.